

Be Careful What You Wish For

Mark 6:14-29 October 15, 2025

Have you heard about the scam where Elon Musk contacts you online and offers you a free car, a bunch of money? All you have to do is send him a \$200 Apple gift card first.¹ Hopefully no one here would fall such a con, because if you take the bait you'd only be poorer in the end.

But, let's do a thought experiment. *What if* Elon Musk actually showed up and offered you a blank check? He just became the first person to be worth half a trillion dollars.² What would you ask for?

We immediately think, "That wouldn't happen." And you're right. On the other hand, in our text we see something similar play out. Herod asks his step-daughter, "What do you want me to give you?"

Yes, it was a hasty oath from a drunk man, but what would she choose? For her life? For her future? Then I realized that moments like this happen somewhat frequently in the Bible.

The king of Sodom offers Abraham all the plunder he wants. Jonathan told David, "Whatever you say I will do for you." King David told Barzillai, "Whatever you desire from me, I will do for you." King Ahasuerus *twice* told Esther, "Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be given to you."

But in the Bible this is *not* only something offered by wealthy men. *God* sometimes poses this question as well. What did God say to Solomon? "Ask. What should I give you?" And in Mark 10, Jesus will ask blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

God has given you breath and life and made you an offer. Choose who you will serve. Choose between life and death. Our choices reveal what we want. And so, *what would* you ask for? *What do* you ask the Lord for? What is motivating and animating the goals and decisions of your life?

Tonight we'll consider 3 characters who all make choices about their spiritual lives and futures. Sadly, they each choose not to surrender to Jesus. And they are all the poorer as a result.

Mark 6:14-15 - ¹⁴ King Herod heard about it, because Jesus's name had become well known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that's why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "He's Elijah." Still others said, "He's a prophet, like one of the prophets from long ago."

Jesus was big news throughout Judea. Big enough that the "king" found himself thinking about it and *worrying* about it. Worried because Jesus' power was undeniable and it was spreading.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/tech/elon-musk-scam-tricks-victims-facebook-tesla-hoax>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattdurot/2025/10/01/elon-musk-just-became-the-first-person-ever-worth-500-billion/>

Now, there are several men called "Herod" in the Bible. They're all related, and the family tree is complicated and sordid. They were all killers, all deep into depravity and behaviors that turn our stomachs. There was a healthy dose of insanity mixed in, too.

There are four main Herods in the Bible. There were even *more*, but these are the four we meet:

Herod the Great is the guy at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke. He remodeled the Temple into it's glorious form during the time of Jesus. He's also the one who killed the babies of Bethlehem.

In the *beginning* of the book of Acts we have Herod Agrippa. He's the one who killed James, the son of Zebedee and who was eaten by worms after God smote him for blasphemous pride.

At the *end* of Acts we see Herod Agrippa II. He's the guy Paul preaches to in chapter 26 and he says, "You almost convince *me* to become a Christian."

And then there's Herod Antipas. *That's* who we're seeing here. He's Herod the Great's son and uncle/great uncle to the Agrippa boys. He was not *really* king. He was called a tetrarch. He *wanted* to be king. In fact, he lobbied too hard to be made a king and Caligula sent him into exile for it.³

Once again we have the central question of Mark's Gospel: *Who is Jesus?* His power was undeniable. His existence *demand*ed a response. People grasped for explanations. "He's one of those wacky prophets that come along from time to time. Unusual, sure, but certainly *not* Who He says He is - the Son of Man. The Messiah. The Lord of the Sabbath. The Forgiver of sins."

God Himself spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism and said, "This is My beloved Son." But rather than *hear* what was said *by* Jesus and *by* the Father, the people made their *own* determinations.

That is *not* the way to know Jesus. We know Him by shutting our mouths, quieting our hearts, and hearing *Him*. By actually hearing His Word in a way that *changes* us inside and out.

Mark 6:16 - ¹⁶ When Herod heard of it, he said, "John, the one I beheaded, has been raised!"

We can see a struggle in Herod's heart. He's *full* of sin, and yet he feels guilt. He wrestles with spiritual issues. *Not* because he believes, but because he's convicted by the truth. He has dread that his sin is going to come back to haunt him.

And, of course, it *would*. Not by John's ghost, but by God's wrath. You see, when you are in sin, it doesn't matter what you try to do to wriggle out of your guilt. It won't work. You can kill the messenger, but the message of God's judgment is still there. The debt *must* be paid.

Mark 6:17-19 - ¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to arrest John and to chain him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. ¹⁸ John

³ Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ So Herodias held a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not,

Herodias was not only Herod's sister-in-law, she was also his niece.⁴ She's the second character who is choosing and acting in this situation. She was *not* wrestling with the truth. She shows *no* guilt for her sin. She's furious that someone would dare to preach to her. The language indicates that she was constantly trying to get John killed.⁵ She *loves* her sin and wants everyone to affirm it.

Why did John bother telling them their actions were unlawful? They're not believers. Antipas didn't even have Jewish blood. His mother was a Samaritan, and his father was Idumean.⁶ Why appeal to them on the basis of God's Law?

Because *that* is the only true standard in life. God's moral law still applied to Herod and his wife, whether they *wanted* to obey it or not. Whether they believed in it or not, God was *right*.

You see, God's morality - *His* definition of good and evil, right and wrong - is a law like gravity. You might be ignorant of the law, you might laugh at the study of the law, you might not *care* about the truth of that law, but it most definitely applies to *you*, whether you want it to or not.

As we present the truth of the Gospel we must not remove what God has to say about sin, about evil, about righteousness and wickedness. *We are lawbreakers. All of us* deserve to die for our sins. The good news of Jesus is not that He makes us *feel* better about life, but that He brings us *from* death to life. That He takes our sin away and deals with it fully and finally.

When our hearts resent that message - when our hearts say "how *dare* you call me a sinner - it's because we *love* our sin and do not *want* it removed. It has wrapped its tendrils around our hearts so that it can claim our lives and send us to the grave. John was trying to save Herod, not hurt him.

Mark 6:20 - ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard him he would be very perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

John the Baptist is usually portrayed as really gruff - almost hostile toward people. He's depicted as strange, maybe even crazy. We picture him angrily shouting his message of hellfire. If *that* was all he was about, why would Herod *like* to listen to him? I don't think he would.

Yes, John was direct. Yes, he spoke of repentance and wrath, but obviously there was more to his message than that. There was some light, some hope, some insight that kept bringing Herod back again and again to hear. Even though it challenged him and convicted him. He liked to hear, but he would not *surrender*. What he cared about most of all was being king. He would not leave the

⁴ Frank Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

⁵ Clifton Allen *Matthew-Mark*

⁶ Utley

throne of his own life and bow before Jesus. And so, he knew no peace. He only had *fear*. He was *afraid* of John and his message. And he was all the poorer for this choice.

This is one of those sad scenes in the Bible. Someone who has such incredible access to the truth. Someone who is so *close* to salvation, yet he leaves it on the table. Don't bother *listening* to the Gospel if you're not going to *obey* it. The Gospel *must* change us. It *must* change our hearts and our minds and our choices and the trajectory of our lives. Instead he chose the scam of sin. He chose the path of get pleasure quick. Get power quick. And his end was the loss of everything.

Now, let's turn for a moment and consider John's example. Herod *knew* he was a holy man. If you're a Christian, your holiness should be absolutely obvious to the world around you. I know we're not perfect, we make mistakes, but if there's no difference between us and the unsaved people around us in how we live our lives, then what are we doing?

As the One Who has called us is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct.⁷ When we walk in righteousness, we need not fear the Herods or Herodias of the world. Even if they kill our bodies, they cannot change our eternities. They cannot rob us of the real wealth and power we have.

Mark 6:21-22 - ²¹ An opportune time came on his birthday, when Herod gave a banquet for his nobles, military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee. ²² When Herodias's own daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I'll give it to you."

Herodias' teen daughter Salome performs a lewd dance here.⁸ This is so awful and horrifying. But *this* is the fruit of sin. *This* is where sin leads. Defilement and ruin and death. It is a disease that strips you of your humanity, of all virtue, of all honor, ultimately of your very life.

Sin made Herod a captive. He could only *pretend* to be king. He was manipulated by his wife. A few years later his army would be defeated by his ex-father-in-law's army.⁹ He was a weakling. But he wanted to *look* strong at his party in front of all his boys.

Mark 6:23 - ²³ He promised her with an oath: "Whatever you ask me I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

In his drunkenness he gave this oath multiple times.¹⁰ *But he had no kingdom to give!*¹¹ Herod was a *puppet* of Rome. If you're *not* a Christian here tonight, you need to know this: You may *think* you are a big deal, you may think you're in charge of your own destiny, you may think that this Jesus stuff is fine for all the losers around you but you're fine as is, but here is the reality: You are sin's puppet. The Bible explains that you are held captive by the devil to do his will. You're not a king,

⁷ 1 Peter 1:15

⁸ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁹ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Vol. 23: Mark*

¹⁰ Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

¹¹ Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Edition*

you're a *slave* to sin. And Jesus Christ has come to set you free and give you life.¹² He is the *only* way out of this trap. You can't buy your way out, you can't trade your way out, you can't think your way out, you can't kill your way out. The only escape from sin and death is Jesus Christ.

Mark 6:24-28 - ²⁴ **She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" "John the Baptist's head," she said.** ²⁵ **At once she hurried to the king and said, "I want you to give me John the Baptist's head on a platter immediately."** ²⁶ **Although the king was deeply distressed, because of his oaths and the guests he did not want to refuse her.** ²⁷ **The king immediately sent for an executioner and commanded him to bring John's head. So he went and beheaded him in prison,** ²⁸ **brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.**

This is evil on another level. After the long and extravagant banquet, what's served on a platter for dessert? The Baptist's head.

Because of how weak sin had made him, Herod was powerless to stop this scheme. Oh, he *could've* said no, but he's a slave to sin. And so, his life could only produce death. The death of his marriage. The death of Herodias' marriage. The death of Salome's innocence. The death of John.

You see, when we don't obey God, when we don't respond to His life-giving word, then sin will drag us into a corner and devour us. He liked John's message. He wanted to hear more. But sin had dominion over him and would not allow it. So now it's the choice: Choose this day life or death.

What is being produced in your life? *Is it* life or is it death? Death of relationships? Death of testimony? Death of spirituality? Christ came so that we may have *life* more abundantly.

Mark 6:29 - ²⁹ **When John's disciples heard about it, they came and removed his corpse and placed it in a tomb.**

So, we've seen Herod making choices. Though he wrestles with the truth, he ultimately chooses self over surrender - the temporal over the eternal. We see Herodias making terrible choices because she loves her sin and refuses to even hear the message of the Gospel.

The third character I want us to evaluate tonight is *not* Salome - she's just an extension of Herodias. No, the third character is actually a group of men - John's disciples.

What they do is admirable and tender and brave - I don't want to take that away from them - but let's pause and ask: *Why does John still have disciples?* John *told* his followers, "There's the Lamb of God! The One we've been waiting for!" And *some* had left to follow Jesus.

¹² See Romans 6, 2 Timothy 2:26

And we know that John's disciples were actively watching, hearing, and reporting to John about what Jesus said and did.¹³ And yet *they did not follow Jesus*. Why? How could *they* be so close and not step into obedient discipleship under Christ? Why follow the forerunner when the King had arrived?

They may not have been like Herod or Herodias, but there was something in *them* that caused them to stop short, too. For whatever reason, they decided to hold themselves back from full obedience to the Messiah. "We like John. We like how he does things. We feel great about our tradition and asceticism and how hardcore we are." They were so disciplined and dedicated and thought themselves close to God, yet *they did not walk with Jesus*. He was not directing their lives.

Now what would they do? Their captain was dead. Buried in the ground. It is a subtle warning to us to not slip into a legalistic traditionalism that is *dead*. We must seek and serve a *Living* Savior. Not a man, but the *God-Man*, Who still speaks, still leads, still calls us into communion with *Him*.

So the question is: What do you want? What do you want out of life? What do you want God to do for you? Do you just want the powers and pleasures of the world? Or do you want a thriving relationship with the living God? Don't settle for sin. Don't settle for trying to be on the throne of your pretend kingdom. But also let's not settle for formal religiosity. Let's not settle for a tradition or a system of spirituality that isn't actively submitted and directed by the Lord Himself.

This is the life God has given us. We may wish circumstances were different, that's ok. But this is your life. The world is offering you big promises. But they're the scam of sin. God is also offering you big promises. What do you want Him to do for you? "Lord, we want to see. Lord, we need wisdom. Lord, we want to be used by You and to glorify You and to know Your power in a real way."

One woman who fell victim to the Elon Musk scam says she thinks about her mistake every minute of every day. She says she wishes she had time machine and not make those couple of clicks.¹⁴

Today is the day the Lord has made. Your life is given to you as a wonderful gift. He has put breath in your lungs. He calls out to you moment by moment. He has offered you more than you could ever ask or imagine. What do we want? What will we chase after? Faith is about trusting Him, *believing* Him, and giving up sin's desires so that our lives can be *truly* enriched by His power and grace. That we recognize Jesus is the source of true life and therefore we will believe Him, follow Him, obey Him, and be transformed by Him, no turning back.

¹³ Luke 7:18-23

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-sussex-57102038>